PLENARY III, WORSHIP, AND PUBLIC WITNESS, GENERAL ASSEMBLY 2013

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Body

The following information was released by the Unitarian Universalist Association (UUA):

Program Description

Plenary III

Unitarian Universalist Association (UUA) Moderator Gini Courter presides over the plenary sessions in which the business of the Association is being conducted.

Worship

In preparation for our witness on the river, we gather to worship. We witness for Earth, our communities and our future generations. This commitment is central to our faith, our theology, and our respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part.

Where is Our Energy? Witness for Earth, Our Communities, and Our Future

Do you know where your energy comes from when you turn on a light switch in your own home? Our climate is changing because of how we harness and use energy, and we are causing harm to our planet, our communities, our neighbors, and our future. We need to stop the harmful effects of practices like mountaintop removal, hydraulic fracturing, mining, and drilling. They are hurting all of our communities, and most especially, communities of color, low-income neighborhoods, and rural towns. We can find new ways forward together. But in order to change how we get our energy, we must first use the energy within all of us to make a change.

Join UUA President Rev. Peter Morales, Wendell Berryauthor, spiritual environmental justice activist, economic critic, and farmerTim DeChristopher, and interfaith and community leaders in a witness for our Earth, our communities, and our future.

Hear testimonies, join in song, prayer, and a reverse water communion. Learn practical ways for how you can make a difference in your life and in your community. Come and wear your Standing on the Side of Love gear. Let's find a sustainable way forward together.

We are partnering with Kentucky Interfaith Power and Light, this years' service project and Sunday collection recipient, and other local and regional organizations.

For the beauty of the Earth and its peoplewe are building a new way!

Reports from UU World

GA Clean Energy Rally Draws Attention from EPA

On the Banks of the Ohio River, Unitarian Universalists Rally for Clean Energy

Agenda

Call to Order

Chalice Lighting

Congregational Singing

Accessibilities for the Witness Event

Recess to Worship and Witness

The following final draft script was completed before this event took place; actual words spoken may vary.

Script

On stage: Members of the Kentucky/West Virginia Unitarian Universalist (UU) Ministers Coalition: Dawn Cooley, Elwood Sturtevant, Claudia Ramisch, Peter Connolly, Cynthia Cain, Rose Edington, Mel Hoover

Hymn: For the Beauty of the Earth

#21 in Singing the Living Tradition (SLT)

Rev. Rose Edington, co-minister, UU Congregation in Charleston, WV: We center and strengthen ourselves to witness by first gathering to worship. Let us begin our worship by celebrating the beauty of our living planet. Please join in singing For the Beauty of the Earth.

Chalice Lighting

Rev. Dawn Cooley, minister, First Unitarian Church, Louisville, KY: As we light our chalice we recall these words from Chief Seattle:

The earth is our mother. Whatever befalls the earth, befalls the children of the earth. This we know: the earth does not belong to us; we belong to the earth. This we know: all things are connected like the blood which unites the human family. All things are connected.

Video

On screen: DVD of mountaintop removal from Jeff Barrie's KiloWattOurs

Rev. Mel Hoover, co-minister, UU Congregation in Charleston, WV: Whatever befalls the earth befalls the sons and daughters of the earth. We did not weave the web of life; we are merely a strand in it. Whatever we do to the web, we do to ourselves. [attributed to Chief Noah Sealth, #550 SLT]

Call to Worship and to Witness

ROSE: At GA 2012 we learned of the need to repudiate the Doctrine of Discovery, which gave Christian explorers the right to claim lands they discovered for their Christian monarchs. The aboriginal peoples and their prior claims to the land were ignored, resulting in racism, colonialism and loss of Native people's rights. There should be no place where the Doctrine of Discovery should continue today.

We from Kentucky and West Virginia bear witness to the effects of a legally upheld practice that is as arrogant to our land and our people as the Doctrine of Discovery. That is the Broad Form Deed that from the Civil War on allowed out-of-state land and coal companies to amass thousands of acres of valuable land through the purchase

of underground mineral rights, while the people still owned the land on the surface. Under the Broad Form Deed coal companies in the 1940s obtained a court ruling that gave them the right to use the surface in any way convenient and necessary to excavate the minerals, and absolved the coal companies from any liability for damages caused by mining.

We the people have suffered from this law. It has led to the destruction of family farms and the Appalachian culture, as well as our mountains and streams. It has established precedence for gas companies to do their unconventional drilling known as hydraulic fracking, which furthers endanger our water supplies.

We fear for our lives because we fear for the quality of our air, land, and water. The ability to safeguard our mountains and streams has been stolen.

ButWe are organizing to take it back!

Litany for Keepers of the Earth

Led by members of the Kentucky/West Virginia UU Ministers Coalition (Revs. Cynthia Cain, Peter Connolly, Rose Edington, Mel Hoover, Claudia Ramisch, Elwood Sturtevant)

Rev. Peter Connolly, minister, UU Church of Bowling Green, KY: (ask people to read slide 1 together, "WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE A KEEPER OF THE EARTH?")

Peter: Many of us from the biblical tradition are familiar with the concept of stewardship, which implies managing and being responsible for resources. We wanted to find a name for ourselves that gets away from any whiff of exploitation, something that implies partnership, that calls us to stand on the side of love with Gaia and all of life. We choose to call ourselves keepers of the earth.

What does it mean to be a keeper of the earth?

IT MEANS THAT WE ACKNOWLEDGE THE TRUTH OF OUR ENERGY POLICIES:

Elwood: A truth in Louisville:

Here in Louisville, we have a coal ash pond and a coal ash pile located near low income and minority neighborhoods. Coal ash contains mercury, arsenic and benzene, among other toxins. When the wind blows here, it carries the toxic ash into the air, and into people's lungs and into everything. Here in Louisville, we have food deserts places where good quality fresh produce is not available. There is land for gardens in these affected neighborhoods, and people there want to be part of the local 10,000 Farmers program, but because of coal ash, their produce would be polluted. And fishing here won't nourish people here either, because the fish are contaminated with mercury from burning coal.

Claudia: A truth on the KY-WV border:

Coal slurry is wet coal waste from mining. It is held behind earthen dams or injected into abandoned underground mines. In October, 2000, about 306 million gallons of slurry near Inez, Kentucky came out of the old mine openings, down two tributaries of the Tug River, that runs between Kentucky and West Virginia and into the Big Sandy that flows into the Ohio. The Coldwater Fork in Kentucky went from a clear, ten foot wide stream to a 100 yard wide expanse of thick slurry that reached 5-7 feet deep in places. This polluting spill was 30 times larger than the Exxon Valdez, and according to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency one of the worst environmental disasters in the southeast United States.

Unfortunately, it was topped by the 2008 spill from the Kingston Fossil Plant in Tennessee. These dangerous spills are totally avoidable, but there are still 285 active slurry ponds in 11 states.

Where is the national outrage? Is it acceptable that poorer areas of the nation are less important than the waters off Alaska?

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Mel: An Appalachian truth:

About 2500 tons of explosives are detonated each week as our mountains are blasted for coal. That is the equivalent of the power of one Hiroshima bomb a week . The insides of our mountains are burned in the US for energy, and are shipped to India and China for their energy needs. The coal companies tell us they are contributing to national security by saving us from the perils of depending on Mideast oil.

Cynthia: A Cautionary Truth:

Half of U.S. energy needs are provided by coal. Converting to natural gas makes the immediate air cleaner, but at the expense of fracking in New England, New York, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Wyoming, West Virginia, Tennessee.

WE ALL USE ENERGY. WE ARE ALL COMPLICIT IN ENERGY ISSUES. WE DEPLORE THAT OUR DAILY COMFORT IS TIED TO THE EXPLOITATION OF GAIA.

Cynthia: With global climate change and the warming of our earth we are more and more aware of the untapped power of our sun to provide solar energy.

WE KEEPERS WILL WORK FOR THE USE OF DIVERSE AND CREATIVE APPROACHES TO SUSTAINABLE ENERGY SOURCES.

WE WILL SEEK THE TRUTH ABOUT ENERGY NEEDS AND RESOURCES, SPEAK THE TRUTHS WE FIND, AND; AS KEEPERS OF THE EARTH USE THE TRUTH TO EMPOWER OUR ACTIONS ON BEHALF OF GAIA.

WE ALL ARE KEEPERS OF THE EARTH WHEREVER WE LIVE.

Introduction of Wendell Berry

Wendell Berry? If asked, we UUs might say, he a Kentucky farmer, poet, and writer. He's in the UU hymnal! Find me a UU church that has not included Wendell Berry's words in their worship.

But he's not just a producer of words for our inspiration and edification.

How many know that Wendell's a son-in-law whose wife Tanya's mother was a decades-long member of the UU Congregation I serve in Lexington, until she died in her nineties?

I was honored to read Dee Amyx's favorite poem of Wendell's at her graveside, and share a bountiful meal in the small, country church where Tanya and Wendell and their family still worship. This tiny slice of Berry life confirmed to me that Tanya and Wendell live by these words.

When I called on a Sunday to inquire about his joining us here, I heard, in the background, the clatter of plates and the laughter and conversation of Sunday supper.

I have a postcard that say, People who tell the truth, with a sketch of Wendell on it. The thing is, he doesn't just tell the truth. That's not so hard! He endeavors to live by it. This sets a high bar for the rest of us, which is good.

Two years ago, Wendell and several other Kentucky citizens spent four days and nights camping out in our Governor's office in the statehouse. They did this to protest Mountaintop Removal Mining. You can hear him talk about it in his interview with Bill Moyers. Not long before that, he withdrew his personal papers from the University of Kentucky when they renamed their basketball players' dormitory Wildcat Coal Lodge.

I think most of us here in Kentucky admire Wendell Berry because he is not only a gifted and prolific writer, as well as a prophetic and courageous voice in a spiritual wilderness, but because he unfailingly speaks and lives his truth. I think the latest edition of Edible Louisville said it well:

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Wendell Berry believes the good life includes sustainable agriculture, healthy rural communities, connection to place, the pleasures of good food, husbandry, good work, local economics, the miracle of life, fidelity, frugality and the interconnectedness of life.

We are grateful and honored by his presence here tonight.

Wendell Berry Speaks

Introduction of Tim DeChristopher by Mel Hoover

I have faith that when we UUs [Unitarian Universalists] truly understand an issue and move beyond denial and defensiveness, we find new ways to join our individual talents, wisdom, and passion, into a collective force; and thenWe create the kind of change that reshapes the future for those yet to come.

Our core UU belief that revelation is not sealed has called us throughout the decades to seek the truth, speak the truth and act from the truth. Today, one of those truth seekers and truth speakers; one who knows wild and wonderful West Virginia and has roots in Appalachian culture; and one who is acting from our UU justice heritageis Tim DeChristopher.

Tim and I share the same belief that the Civil Rights Issue for these times is Environmental Justice. Environmental justice cuts across all our isms, and calls on all of us to join together and turn the world around, or we we will all pay the same tragic price of planet devastation. Tim has demonstrated an extraordinary commitment to environmental justice, from his civil disobedience as Bidder 70' at a 2008 auction of oil and gas leases for and subsequent for which he received a two year prison sentence, to the formation of his organization Peaceful Uprising, and his call to UU ministry . At this time I reach out my hand to welcome Tim DeChristopher to speak his truth.

Tim DeChristopher Speaks

Invitation to the Witness

Elwood Sturtevant: With Tim Darst representing local partners, will invite us to march to the Belvedere.

Closing Words

Elwood: Please join hands with those beside you. Let us read together:

WE EXTINGUISH THE CHALICE,

BUT NOT THE LIGHT OF JUSTICE BURNING WITHIN OURSELVES

AS WE JOIN HANDS WITH EACH OTHER,

WE SYMBOLICALLY JOIN HANDS WITH THOSE WHO HAVE GONE BEFORE US

AND THOSE WHO WILL COME AFTER US.

WE ARE PART OF THE LONG PROCESSION OF THOSE WHO STAND ON THE SIDE OF LOVE

FOR ALL PEOPLE

FOR OUR PLANET

FOR TODAY AND FOR OUR FUTURE

NOW, WE DEPART TO MEET OUR LOCAL PARTNERS WHO ARE WORKING TO RELIEVE GAIA'S AGONY.

NOW WE JOIN HANDS AND VOICES TO STAND ON THE SIDE OF LOVE AND BUILD A NEW WAY. AMEN!

Departure

Elwood: Gini Courter gives us our marching orders.

Gini: We will leave the Plenary Hall together, taking escalators and elevators down to the 3rd Street Lobby, and proceed to the Belvedere plaza for our witness event where we will gather at the river with community partners. The Belvedere is located on the riverfront between 4th and 6th Streets. Our District Presidents, in the purple T-shirts will be guiding you along the march route.

Here's Matt Meyer to get us started on our way to our witnessEnergy for Change: Interfaith Action for Clean Energy and Healthy Communities.

Hymn of Departure: Come and Go with Me

For more information contact web@uua.org

This work is made possible by the generosity of individual donors and congregations. Please consider making a donation today.

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